

Air Mail History of Kansas City

Purpose of the Exhibit

To demonstrate the importance Kansas City played in establishing the first transcontinental Contract Air Mails Routes that crisscrossed the United States, eventually providing daily scheduled air mail service to all major cities.



August 15, 1927 Springfield, IL to St. Louis, MO

Cover flown by Colonel Charles Lindbergh during a ceremonial flight over the new Springfield airport during the dedication. Unusual multi-color cachet. Franked with the recently released Lindbergh 10c air

On August 17, 1927, Colonel Charles A. Lindbergh landed his airplane, the Spirit of St. Louis, onto a muddy field to dedicate the 453 acres of land that was purchased by the city of Kansas City, Missouri for the site of its future airport. Lindbergh proclaimed, "Kansas City has a great aviation future".

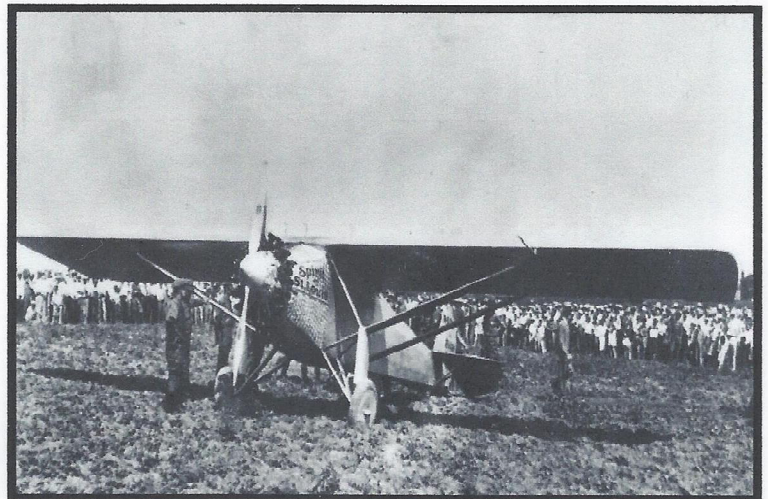
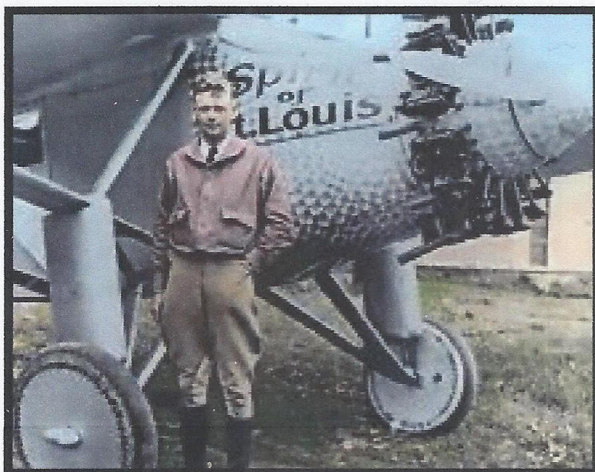
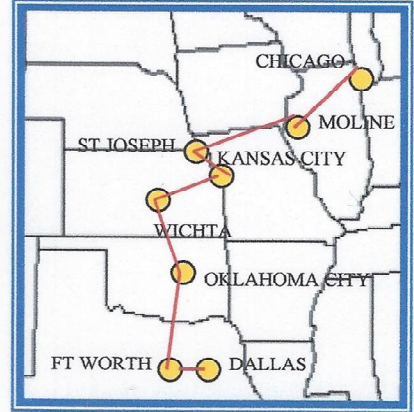


Exhibit Outline

- I. Colonel Charles A. Lindbergh connection
- II. Contract Air Mail Route 3
- III. Contract Air Mail Route 3 extended
- IV. Contract Air Mail Route 28
- V. Contract Air Mail Route 30
- VI. Contract Air Mail Route 34

Contract Air Mail Route 3

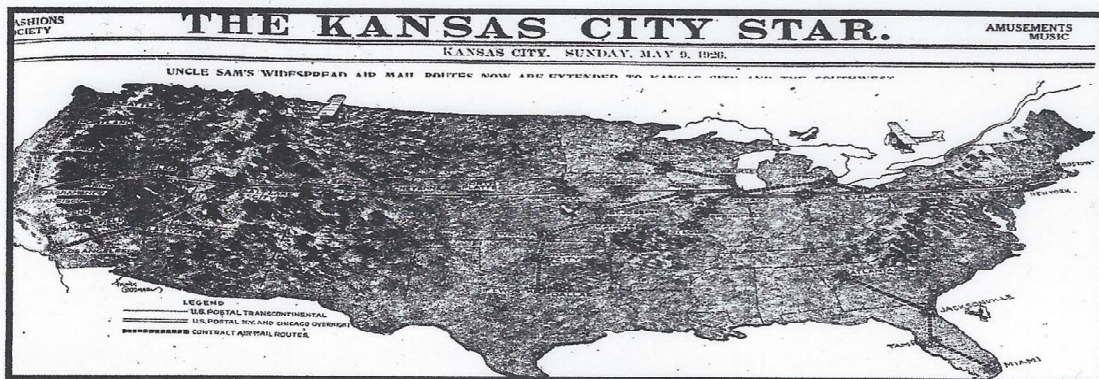
Kansas City played an important role in the development of the continental air mail routes. Prior to 1926 all air mail operations had been conducted by the US Government. The Air Mail Act of 1925 (Kelly Act) authorized the postmaster general to contract for domestic airmail service with commercial air carriers on specific routes. National Air Transport was awarded the contract for route 3. The air mail rate for 1 ounce was 10 cents. The Post Office Department furnished an official cachet for each city on the route.



The first route using Kansas City as a stopping point was designated as CAM-3 and was contracted to National Air Transport. Service was inaugurated on May 12, 1926, between Chicago and Dallas with stops at Moline, St. Joseph, Kansas City, Wichita, Oklahoma City and Ft. Worth. Over 8000 people greeted the flights landing and taking off at Richards Field in Raytown, MO.



May 12, 1926. Mail was transferred from the aircraft "St. Joseph" that departed Chicago at 6:05 AM and flew to Kansas City, arriving at 10:55 AM. The south bound flight piloted by R L Dobie in the aircraft "Miss Kansas City", departed for Wichita. This cover continued on the southbound route to Oklahoma City before it was sent back north along the same route to Chicago, then by air to Detroit and Cleveland to connect with an eastbound train to its final destination. Very unusual franking of the 10 cent air mail rate.

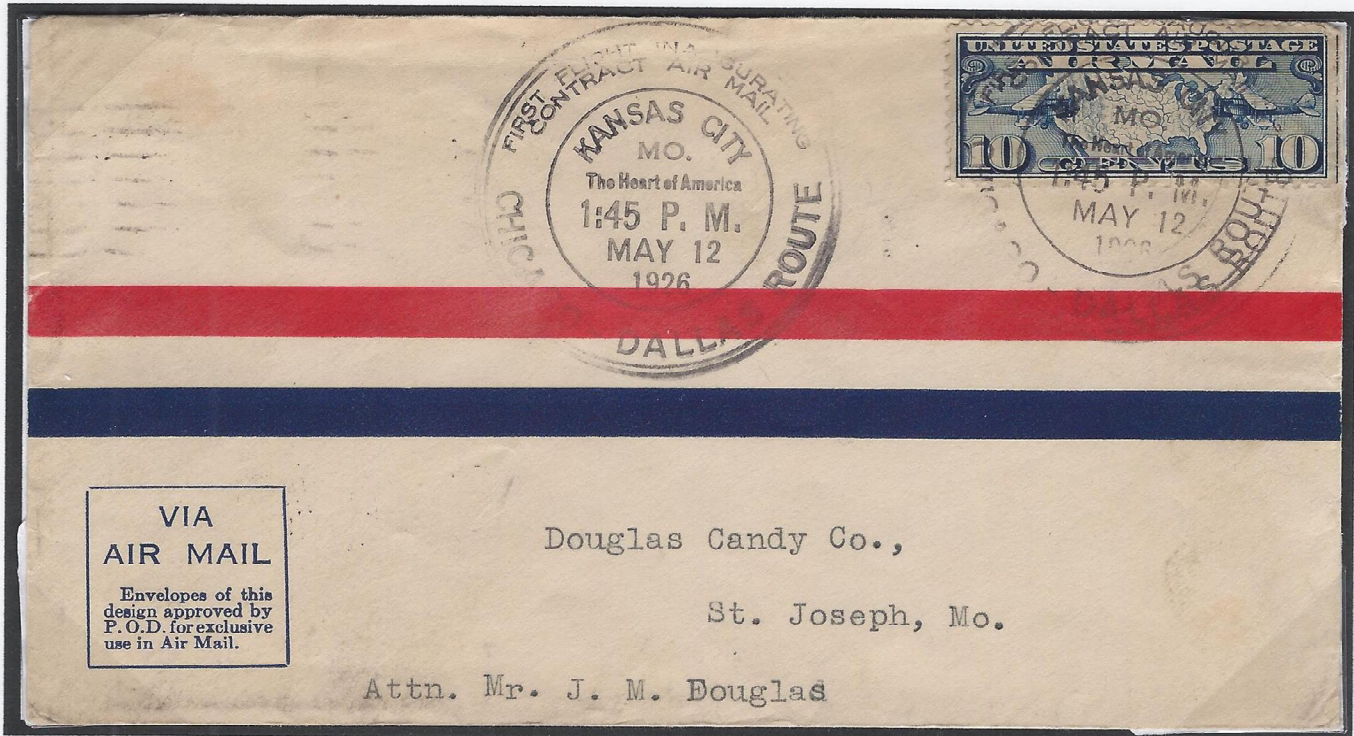


The May 9, 1926 Kansas City Star printed a map of the current air mail routes contracted to carriers. There was no air route west from New York at that time.

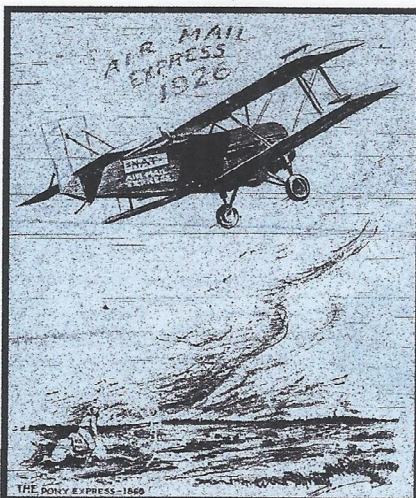
Contract Air Mail Route 3



National Air Transport had 10 Curtiss Carrier Pigeon bi-planes with Curtiss engines for this initial air service. The Carrier Pigeon bi-planes were built by the Curtiss Aeroplane Company.



May 12, 1926. Kansas City to St Joseph. The first north bound flight took off for St Joseph piloted by Roland H Fatt. All mail was cancelled with a cachet provided by the Post Office Department. Kansas City was one of only two cities allowed to include a special inscription below the city name, "The Heart of America".



The inaugural flights were flown by these pilots:
 D A Askew,
 R L Dobie,
 R H Fatt,
 L H Garrison,
 P E Johnson,
 H L Kindred and
 Edmund Matucha.

The May 12, 1926 Kansas City Star printed this drawing comparing mail delivery between 1860 and 1926.

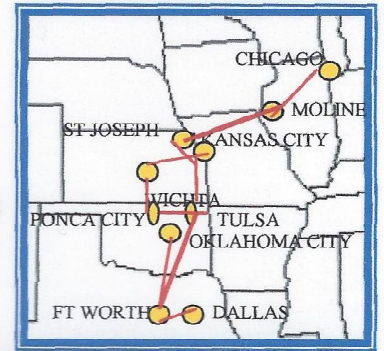


PICTURES OF PILOTS

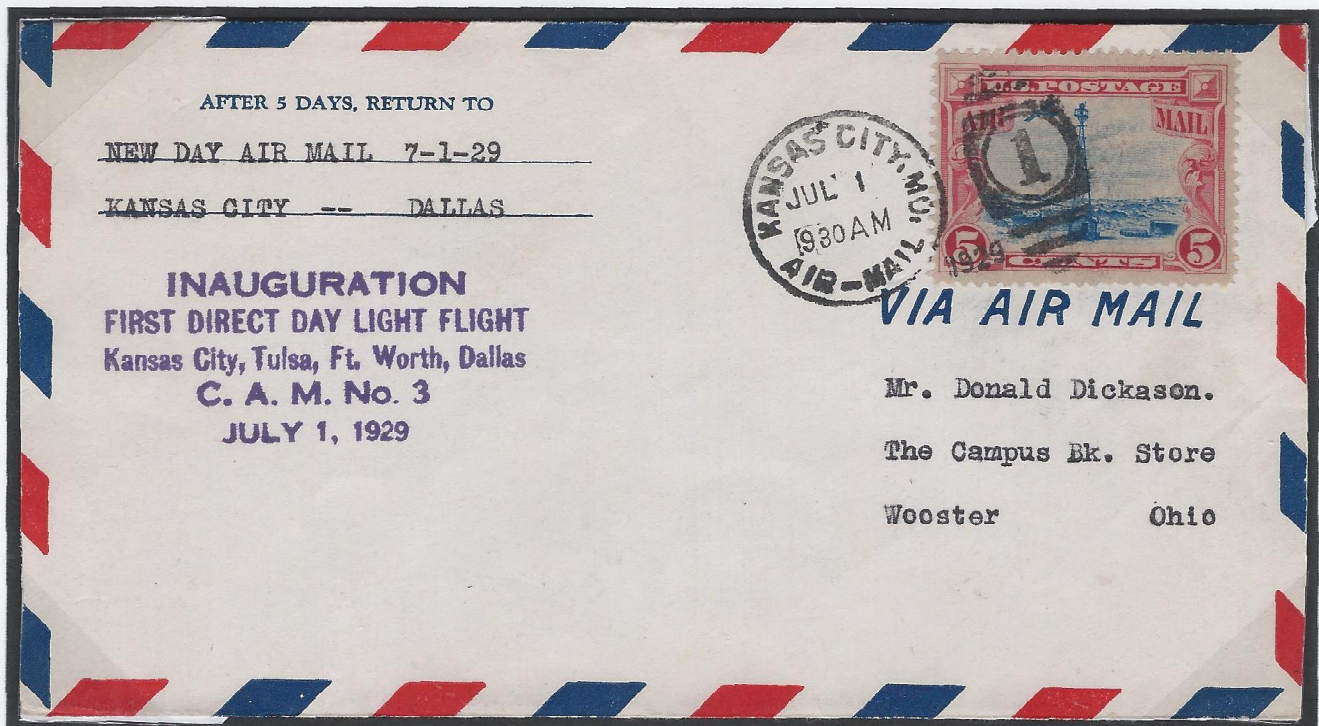
PILOTS of the National Air Transport, Inc., who on May 12 completed their first year of flying on Contract Air Mail Route No. 3 (Chicago-Texas)
 During the year these pilots flew 776,351 miles without injury to anyone and without the loss of a single piece of mail.
NATIONAL AIR TRANSPORT, INC.
 506 So. Wabash Ave. Chicago, Ill.

Contract Air Mail Route 3 Extended

On April 4, 1927 Ponca City, OK was added as a stop between Wichita and Oklahoma City. On July 5, 1928 Tulsa was added to the route by spur service from Ponca City. Direct day service started on July 1, 1929 from Kansas City to Dallas with stops at Tulsa and Ft Worth. No special cachets were provided by the Post Office Department but some covers bear distinctive markings provided by the contractor. The rate for air mail dropped to 5 cents for the 1st ounce on August 1, 1928.



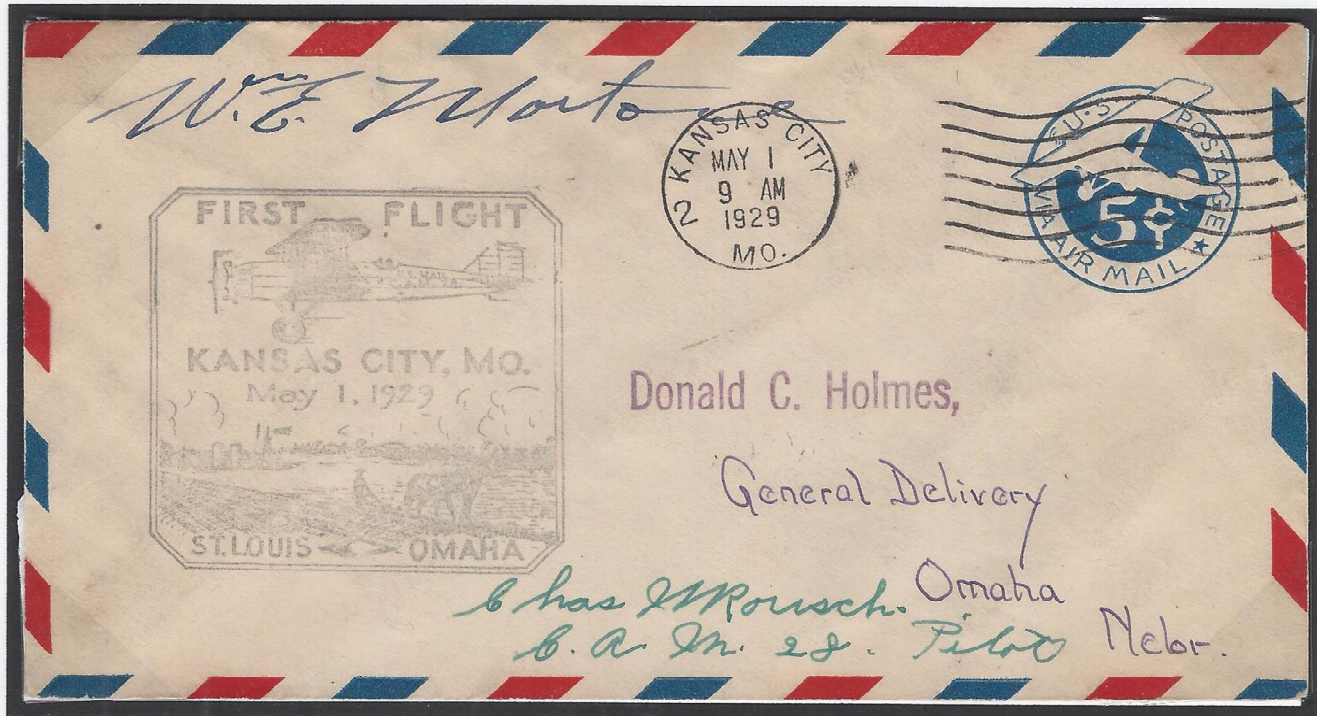
July 5, 1928.
Tulsa to Ponca City to Wichita to Kansas City to St Joseph. Arrived in Kansas City 2:00 AM on July 6 and St Joseph a few hours later.



July 1, 1929. Kansas City to Tulsa to Ft Worth to [redacted] Dallas for return trip, arriving in Wooster, OH July 2.

Contract Air Mail Route 28

May 1, 1929 marked the inauguration of Contract Air Mail Route 28 between St. Louis, MO and Omaha, NE stopping in Kansas City, MO. The contract was awarded to Robertson Aircraft Corp. This route connected CAMs 3, 18 and 30 at the three cities. Fairfax Field in Kansas City, KS was being used by all air mail and passenger carriers. The Post Office Department provided official cachets for all three cities on this route. Service was one flight per day in each direction.



May 1, 1929. Kansas City to Omaha. Signed by the pilot Charles W Rousch and the postmaster of Kansas City, W E Morton. Charles was a famous aviation pioneer along with his two brothers, Usher and Berl. All three died in separate airplane crashes. Charles' death was particularly tragic as he tried to parachute from his plane but his chute became tangled in the plane's rudder. He was killed on January 21, 1932.



Robertson used DeHavilland DH-4 bi-planes with Liberty engines. The DH-4 bi-planes were re-built from government surplus parts.

Airmail Flier Killed In Crash Near Rockford

Colvin Park, Ill. —(AP)—A premonition of danger failed to save the life of Charles W. Rousch, 33, pilot for the Northwest Airways between Madison, Wis., and Chicago. He crashed to his death near here late yesterday just a half hour after he took off from the Rockford, Ill., airport expressing concern over flying weather.

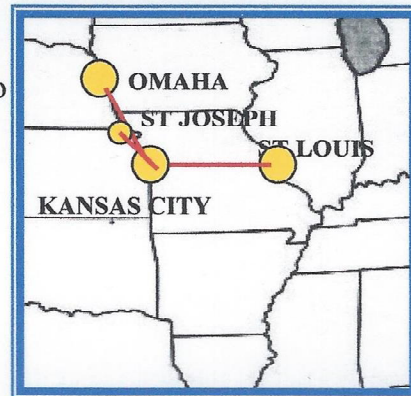
"I might not be able to make Chicago," he told an attendant. "Wait for me 15 minutes."

The crash was witnessed by W. W. Baxter, a railroad towerman, who said the plane took fire in the air after an explosion and fell to the ground ablaze.

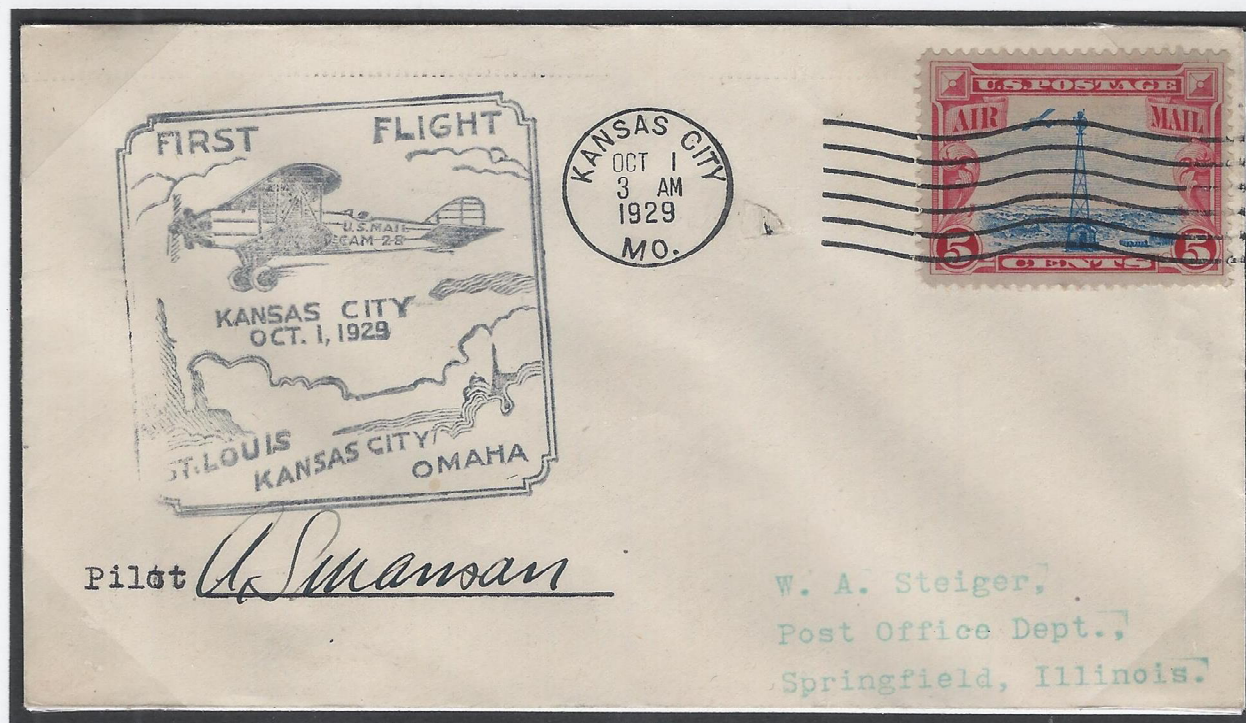
It was apparent Rousch, who lived at Robinson, Ill., had made a desperate attempt to save himself as his half opened parachute was found entangled in the tail of the plane. Rousch formerly flew from Chicago to Kansas City for United Airways.

Contract Air Mail Route 28

On October 1, 1929, St Joseph, MO was added to the route and service was increased to two flight per day in each direction, being divided into day service and night service. The Post Office Department provided a cachet similar to the one used for the initial May 1 service.

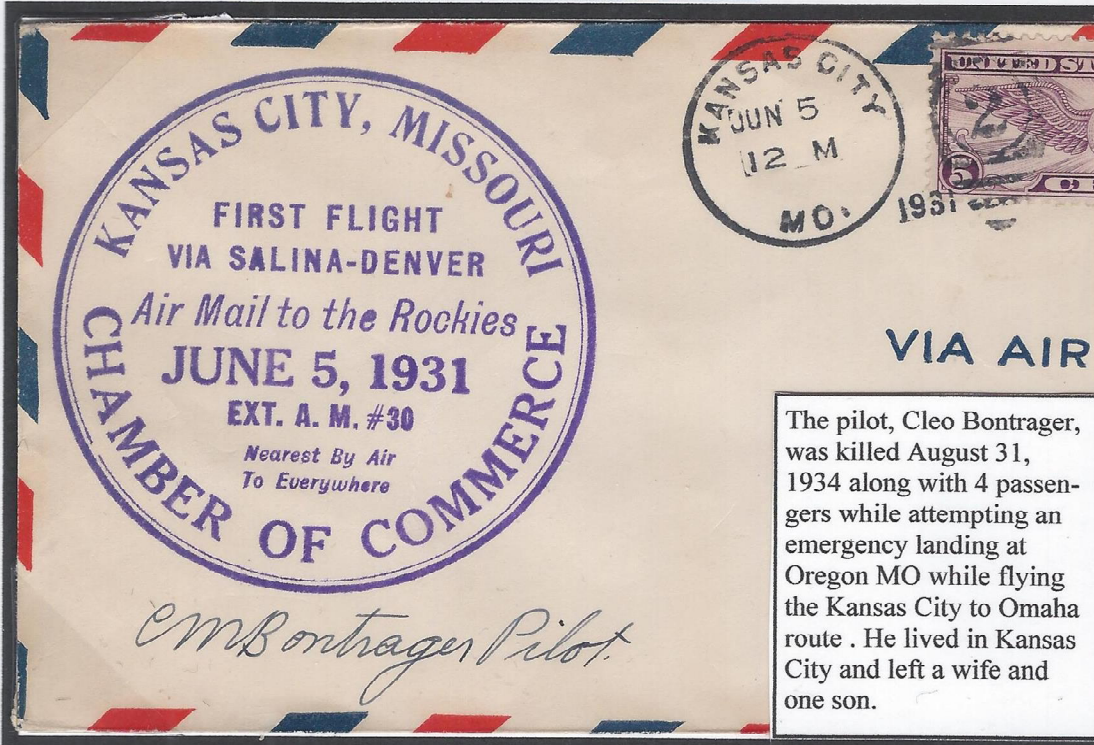
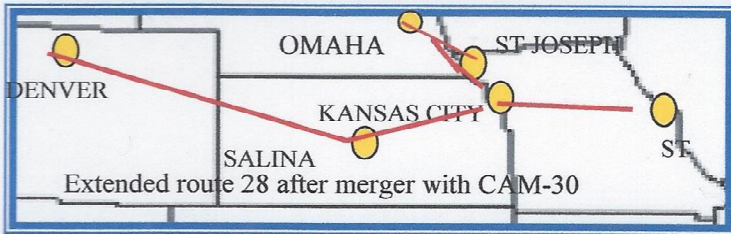


October 1, 1929. Although the final destination of these two covers are in opposite directions from Kansas City, they both went on the eastbound plane flown by pilot A Swanson to St Louis. The bottom cover was then flown directly to Springfield, IL, arriving the same day. The top cover returned to Kansas City and then went to St Joseph, arriving the following day, on October 2. Swanson was a former member of the Royal Swedish Air Force.

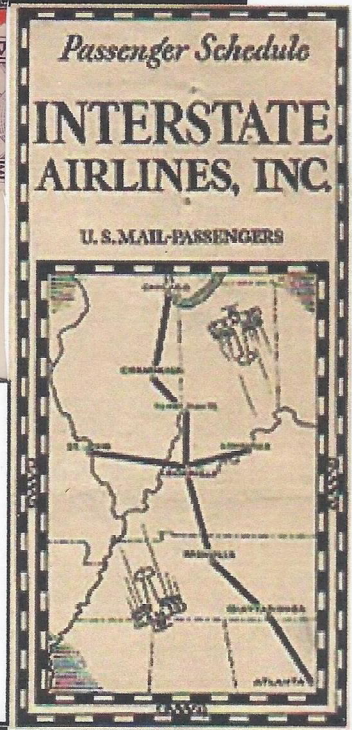


Contract Air Mail Route 30

On May 15, 1931, CAM-28 was combined with CAM-30 that provided service between Chicago and Atlanta. Service was extended on **June 5, 1931** from Kansas City to Denver via Salina, Kansas. This route was operated by Interstate Airlines. They operated both mail and passenger service and boasted a fleet of twelve aircraft including seven Fairchilds and three Stearmans. The Post Office Department did not provide an official cachet for this flight. Shown below are two locally provided cachets, one from each side of the Kansas-Missouri border.

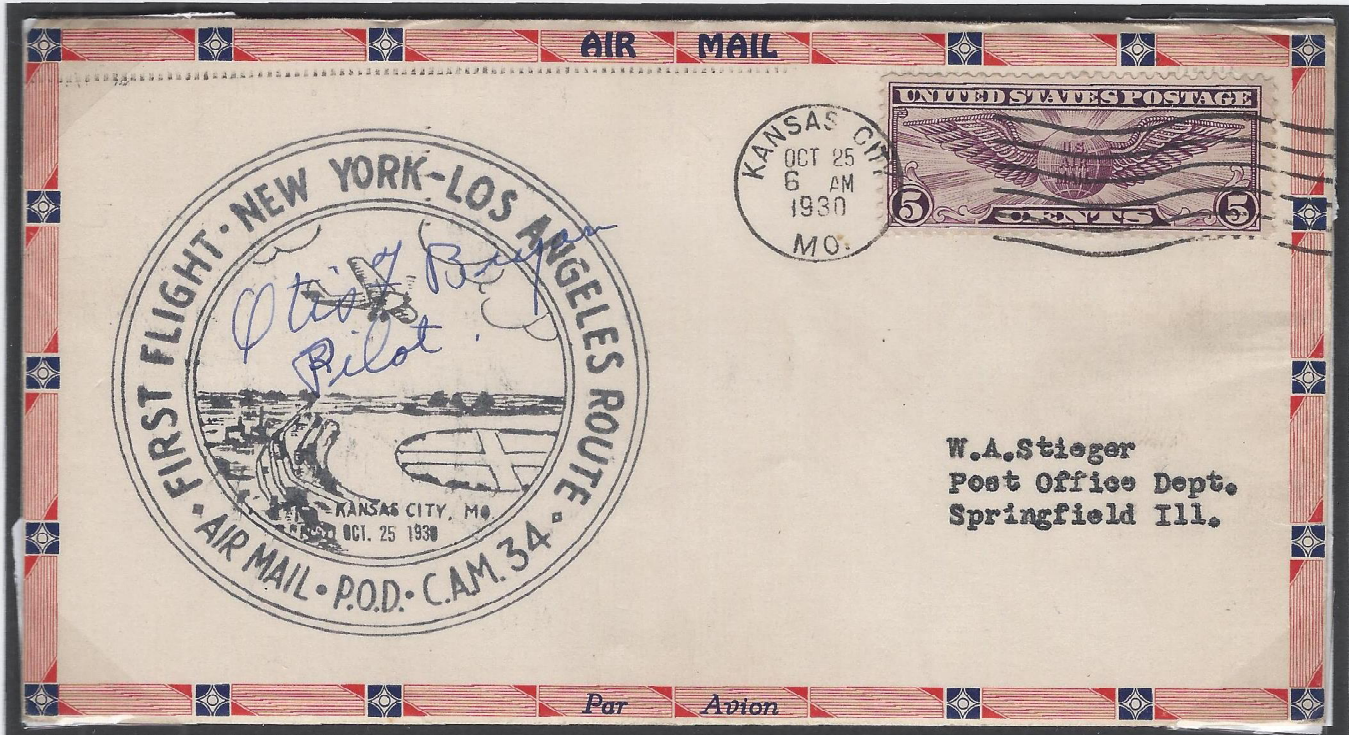


The pilot, Cleo Bontrager, was killed August 31, 1934 along with 4 passengers while attempting an emergency landing at Oregon MO while flying the Kansas City to Omaha route. He lived in Kansas City and left a wife and one son.

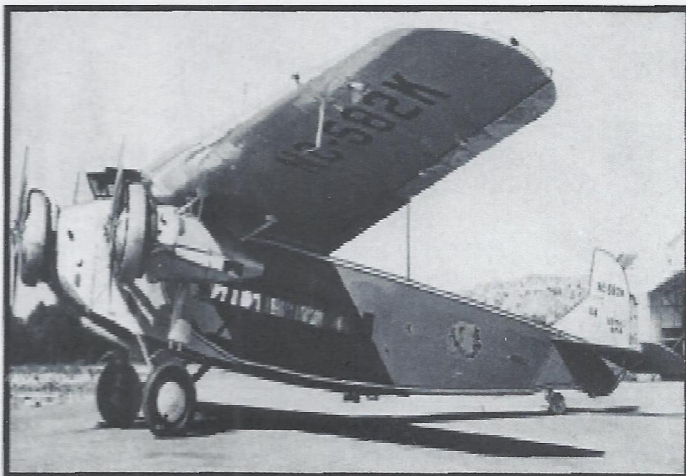


Contract Air Mail Route 34

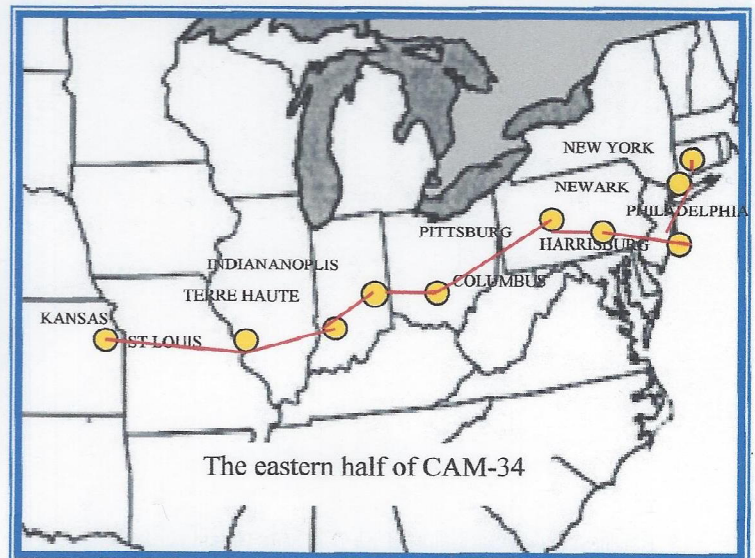
On October 25, 1930 the Central Transcontinental Route was inaugurated to provide coast to coast service, between New York, NY and Los Angeles, CA. The route was divided into two major sections; New York to Kansas City and Los Angeles to Kansas City. Kansas City was the operational layover city. Stops on the eastern portion were at Newark, NJ, Philadelphia, Harrisburg and Pittsburg, PA, Columbus, OH, Indianapolis and Terre Haute, IN, and St Louis, MO. Stops on the western portions were at Winslow, AZ, Albuquerque, NM, Amarillo, TX and Wichita, KS. CAM-34 was awarded to Transcontinental & Western Air.



October 25, 1930. Kansas City to St Louis to Springfield. Signed by the pilot Otis F Bryan. The Post Office Department provided official cachets for all stops on this route. The unique cachet for Kansas City shows an aircraft flying over Kansas City Municipal Airfield in Kansas City, MO that was used by all major carriers.

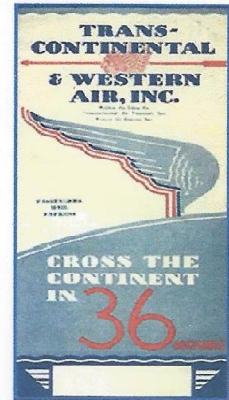


The inaugural flights used Fokker F10 tri-motor aircraft

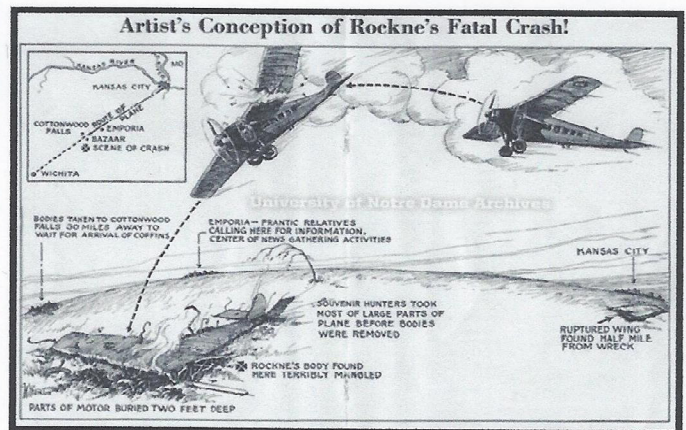
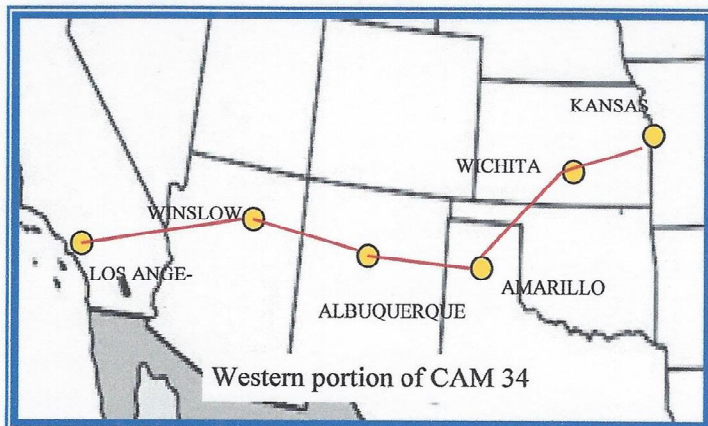


Contract Air Mail Route 34

CAM-34 was awarded to Transcontinental & Western Air. The airline was the result of mergers between Standard Airlines, Western Air Express and Transcontinental Airlines. The new company, TW&A started operations on July 15, 1930. The companies merged at the urging of Postmaster General Walter Brown, who was looking for bigger airlines to give airmail contracts to. TW&A named CAM-34 "The Lindbergh Route" and it took 36 hours to fly from coast to coast with an overnight stop in Kansas City..



October 25, 1930. Kansas City to Wichita to Amarillo to Albuquerque. Very unusual cancel at the Federal Reserve Bank. The pilot on this flight was Joseph Kuhn.



After the crash of flight 599, the airline helped design an aircraft specifically for passenger service and started flying the twin engine DC-1, built by the Douglas Aircraft Corporation.

TW&A flight 599 en route from Kansas City to Los Angeles on March 31, 1931, on its first leg to Wichita crashed into an open field a few miles southwest of Bazaar, Kansas. All eight on board died, including famed football coach Knute Rockne of the University of Notre Dame